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ABSTRACT

The effect of evaluation method on English as second language (ESL) learners' revisions of their compositions was investigated. Teacher comments, peer evaluations, and English-speaking peer reformulations were compared. Judges rated the revised compositions of 9 advanced and 14 intermediate college ESL students using the ESL Composition Profile. The Profile scores compositions on content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Both the intermediate and advanced students showed a similar pattern of improvement from first draft to revision. It was found that neither teacher nor peer feedback was superior in promoting improvements in revised compositions. It is concluded that peer feedback should be considered because of its potential benefits as a saver of teacher editorial time. In addition, if the revision process can be learned as an interaction between writers and their readers, second language learners can better appreciate the function of writing proficiency. (RW)

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Evaluating Writing:
Effects of Feedback on Revision*

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Evaluating Writing:
Effects of Feedback on Revision[1]

Craig Chaudron

Abstract

In teaching writing to ESL learners, the use of peer evaluations as stimuli for revision, instead of the more traditional normative teacher evaluation, constitutes an attempt to provide the learner with feedback at his/her stage of development. Whether or not one of these evaluation methods is superior in promoting revision has not been determined objectively.

This study compares differences in learners' improvement in revision of their compositions depending on the method of evaluation, whether teacher's comments, or peer evaluations. The measure of improvement used is the ESL Composition Profile (Jacobs, et al. 1981). Several factors are considered, including the level of learner (intermediate or advanced), the types of errors rectified in revision, and the degree of interest expressed by the learners in receiving evaluation of one type or the other. The method of providing peer reformulation is also compared briefly with teacher and peer evaluation. It was found that neither teacher nor peer feedback was superior in promoting improvement on revision, although the results are limited because they are based on a small group of students.

INTRODUCTION

The growth in interest in the teaching of writing has been accompanied by a "transplanting" of focus from the teaching of writing as a product to the teaching of writing as a process. This transplant has yet to bear full fruit in the ESL field, although researchers such as Zamel (1976, 1982) and Barnes (1982) have convincingly urged new directions.

We are nonetheless gradually moving away from an emphasis on the model of structured outline - to - translation into rhetorical form - to - final evaluation, towards a model of prewriting, writing, and rewriting, a process involving the discovery of the writer's ideas through writing. In the ESL classroom, where both students' and teachers' concern with linguistic form play an overriding role, it is difficult to transform this latter model into practice.

Taylor (1981) and Pica (1982), among others, have outlined practical steps for developing L2 learners' prewriting skills, while research is just underway in investigating the writing stage (e.g. Jones 1982, Gaskill 1983). Furthermore, the stage of rewriting, or revision, is a productive area for practical application, as seen in recent work by Brinton (1983) and Cohen (1982, 1983), who have developed methods for providing peer feedback to writing. Whereas the traditional model of teaching writing has assumed that learners will develop target-language norms by receiving final evaluations and corrections from the teacher, the process model counts the revision stage as a critical one, in that it is probably here that L2 learners begin to refine their acquired L2 knowledge, recognizing the formal distinctions, and resulting communicative, functional effects of different target forms.

Also, as learners receive feedback from others as to the effectiveness of their writing, and are required to respond to this information before counting their product as finished, they not only will develop their interlanguage intuitions, but they will learn the fact that writing is a process, and that good writing involves an interaction between their ideas, the expression of the ideas, and their reader's perceptions and reactions.

DIFFERENT EFFECTS OF FEEDBACK IN WRITING

There is, therefore, good reason to be interested in the effect, if any, on learners' abilities to revise when they are provided different types of feedback. I am especially interested in the differences in effect between teachers' feedback and peer feedback. There are several reasons that the provision of peer feedback in particular may have positive effects. (These are summarized from Witbeck 1976, Partridge 1981, Bolin, Berezin, and Golding 1982, and Brinton 1983.)

1. Teachers' time may be saved by eliminating certain editing tasks, thus freeing them for more helpful instruction and guidance;
2. Peers' feedback is more at the learner's level of development or interest, thus perceived as more relevant than the superior or older teacher's feedback;
3. Since multiple peers may be used, learners gain a sense of a wider audience than the one teacher;
4. Learners' attitudes toward writing can be enhanced by the more socially supportive peers;

5. Learners also learn more about writing and revision by having to read each others' drafts critically.

Numerous first language studies have attempted to compare the effects of different forms of teacher feedback (see Ziv 1981, Searle and Dillon 1980, Knoblauch and Brannon 1981), with comparisons among, for example, explicit corrections, supportive praise, and lengthy critique. L2 researchers have not begun to consider specific effects of different teacher treatments.

Still other research has been underway to develop the methods and to evaluate the effects of peer feedback. For description of methods, see especially L1 research by Brufee (1978), Harris (1978), Jacko (1978), Bean (1979), and Bolin, et al. (1982), and L2 research by Witbeck (1976) and Brinton (1983). These methods include checklists, edit guides, and group discussions.

As for the comparison between effects of peer feedback and teacher feedback, research has turned out very mixed findings. This is revealed in reviews of the topic by Lamberg (1980) and Partridge (1981).

I shall summarize briefly the types of studies that have been undertaken. A variety of L1 studies measured improvement between pre- and post-treatment essays for experimental and control groups. Of these, Pierson (1967), working with ninth graders, and Putz (1970) and Pfeiffer (1981), studying college freshmen, found no significant differences between students receiving various peer evaluation feedback and equivalent groups receiving teacher feedback. Pfeiffer also reported that the peer group showed no significantly different lowering

of writing anxiety as measured by the Writing Apprehension Test. These findings suggest that peer feedback does not enhance outcomes on revision, although neither is it detrimental.

Other L1 studies have found, on the other hand, that groups experiencing peer evaluation improved *more* than control groups with teacher evaluation, especially Ford (1973) and Karengianes, Pascarella, and Pflaum (1980), who worked with college freshmen and low-achieving tenth graders, respectively. To my knowledge, the only study of this nature with L2 learners was by Partridge (1981) Over a semester in one class, Partridge had selected students exchange papers, while others received teacher feedback, with the groups varying over time so that all learners experienced both treatments. T-test comparisons betweeen a sampling of originals and rewrites on six different essay topics showed that the teacher feedback contributed to greater improvement. Partridge also reports the results of her questionnaire on students' attitudes toward peer feedback, to show that the students were more positive about giving feedback than receiving it, that is, they recognized the benefits of the practice for them to improve in revision skills and to recognize other means of expression, but they "doubted the quality and accuracy of their peers' corrections and comments." (p. 60)

Partridge even argues that need for students' greater selectivity in receiving peer evaluation is a positive outcome of the procedure. She emphasizes the point that while teacher feedback may provide a better "map" for a student's immediate revision, in the long run peer evaluation could contribute more to the learner's confidence in judgment and sensitivity to audience.

It should be noted that Partridge's study examined the effects of peer and teacher evaluation on revisions of drafts, rather than on pre- and post-tests, and thus it has explored a treatment effect different from that in the L1 studies. There may be a difference between the effect on the students' ability immediately to gain insight from the feedback for the revision, and the more developmental learning measured buy pre- and post-tests. Perhaps this is the reason for Partridge's stronger teacher effect, although the extra factor that these are L2 students in this case makes the comparison with L1 studies more difficult.

But there is an important methodological reason for not being able to conduct the type of experimental vs. control group study with pre- and post-test; namely, that the uncertain status of peer evaluation as an aid in L2 writing limits the possibilities, out of concern for the learners' potential disenchantment with a solely peer treatment. A within-subjects design with measures only of revision effects is thus the more appropriate type of study.

What I want to report here is in effect a replication, although not an exact one, of Partridge's study, of which I was ignorant until the end of my own research. The questions addressed by this research were:

1. Will students' revisions of their essays show greater improvement when they receive peer feedback than when they receive teacher feedback? and
2. What will be the effect on their attitude of the experience with peer feedback and teacher feedback?

METHOD

In the fall quarter, 1982, the emphasis in my own advanced writing class for ESL students (N=14) was on the *process* of writing and revising. Of four out-of-class essays, the middle two were experimental exercises, in which on the first, one half of the class received peer evaluations as a basis for revision of their drafts, while the other half received teacher feedback. On the second of the two experimental essays, the two groups were reversed.

For the teacher feedback treatment, I wrote comments of all kinds on the drafts, attempting to localize and characterize points of grammatical or mechanical error, or rhetorical weaknesses, without stating explicitly what was correct. This was my normal type of feedback on students' drafts, which I believe guides them, without merely giving them a model, to more correct forms. The draft received a tentative letter grade, which would be replaced by the grade on the final revision. All of the students had had one essay marked in this manner for the very first assignment.

For the peer treatment, which had been practiced once on an in-class assignment, students followed procedures like those developed by Brinton (1983). A set of guiding questions (not as explicit, however, as the edit guide described by Bolin, et al. 1982) was used to lead the evaluator to make direct marks on the drafts for perceived linguistic and mechanical problems, and to write a summary short essay discussing the merits and problems seen in the essay.

In order to reduce the L2 students' understandable anxiety over the accuracy of the peer feedback, I first read each peer critique,

gave *it* a letter grade for completeness, usually a high mark, and commented on its overall accuracy, before handing the draft back to the writer for revision. This should have introduced little bias, however, for in all cases, I positively supported the remarks of the critic, even though I privately could recognize some shortcomings and inaccuracies. In only one or two cases did I have to state, with intentional vagueness, however, that some of the critique was a little inaccurate. The burden of decision was still placed on the writer. The students' revised essays were then given a letter grade.

A similar procedure was followed by a second teacher in a high intermediate composition class (N=17). There were of course some differences in the type and degree of teacher comments made in the teacher feedback condition, and this teacher did not give letter grades on the peer critiques. This teacher also was compelled to note a few cases of serious grammatical or mechanical inaccuracies in several peer critiques, in part owing to the lower level of learner in her class.

To support the investigation, a questionnaire on students' opinions about their own writing practices and preferences for various types of assistance was administered to both classes, at the beginning and end of the quarter. This questionnaire was also submitted early and late in the quarter to a third class, a lower level still, at a low intermediate level of writing skill, for comparative purposes. This lower class did not receive the same type of out-of-class peer critique and revision, although it did practice peer critiquing in class several times.

To evaluate the effects of peer and teacher feedback, photocopies were made of all first drafts, both prior to and after teacher or peer

comments, and of all the revised essays. The draft and revised essays from both the advanced and the high intermediate class groups were combined and shuffled. In this way, the evaluators would rate the essays blind as to treatment group and stage of revision. All the essays were each read and given scores independently by the two classroom instructors, according to the ESL Composition Profile developed by Jacobs, et al. (1981). Although there was a significant correlation between the instructors' judgments ($r=.66$, $p<.001$), it did fall short of what could be expected for interjudge reliability. (This lower reliability in judgments on composition evaluation is a frequent difficulty in such research, experienced also by Partridge 1981, Pierson 1967, and others.) All compositions for which the judges' scores differed by eight or more were therefore given to a third judge, who rated them on the same scale. The three judges' scores were then averaged to determine each essay score.

Since several students failed to complete their peer revisions, their other essays were dropped from the final comparison between treatment groups. This left an N of 9 and 14 in the two class groups, respectively.

RESULTS

T-test comparisons between group means (see Table 1) indicated that, as expected, the two class groups differed significantly in their level of writing on their first drafts and revised essays. with the advanced class significantly higher in both cases (t-test = -3.43, $p<.05$ and -3.23, $p<.05$, two-tailed, respectively).

Insert Table 1 about here

Also, a comparison of mean differences between the draft and revised essays for all subjects showed a significant difference (t-test = -2.46, $p<.05$, two-tailed), suggesting that the overall improvement on the revisions was significant, but the difference in mean improvements between the two classes was not significant. To test for differences between teacher and peer feedback, oneway analysis of variance with improvement dependent and treatment group independent proved to be not significant. Since there had been a large amount of attrition, with too few and unequal N in each cell, more elaborate statistical analysis is unwarranted.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

It appeared, consequently, that the type of treatment itself did not matter for revision. It was, however, of interest to determine if in any way the particular *type* of improvement made by students receiving teacher or peer feedback was any different. The ESL Composition Profile consists of five weighted subscales, one each for content (30 points), organization (25 points), vocabulary (20 points), language use (20 points), and mechanics (5 points). Since the two class groups appeared overall to exhibit a similar pattern in improvement, they were collapsed into one group, and the scores by draft and revision were plotted for each composition and type of treatment. These are shown in Figure 1. There are several points to make about Figure 1.

Table 1

Mean Scores on Essays*

	Draft	Revision	Improvement
Class 1 (N=14)	77.9	80.0	2.1
Class 2 (N=9)	84.3	87.0	2.7
Both Classes	80.4	82.8	2.4

*Scores out of 100, on ESL Composition Profile (Jacobs, et al. 1981)

Insert Figure 1 about here

It should be noted in the total scores box (out of 100 possible), that the teacher feedback results on the first composition are for the same group of students as the peer feedback on the second composition (N=14), and conversely for the other group (N=9). The first group appears simply to benefit much from either treatment, while the second group does not improve at all. While the short mechanics subscale (not shown) revealed little difference among any of these groups or compositions, due to the relatively high mechanical skills of all the students, the total score pattern is repeated for all the other subscales of the profile. The sole apparent divergence from the pattern is the second group's content improvement with teacher feedback on the second composition. Thus, there was either an intrusive effect of differences between the two groups (they were, nevertheless, chosen randomly from the total class group), or there exists an unexpected effect of the order in which treatments were received. Which of these is the correct interpretation cannot be determined from these data.

A third feedback procedure was included in this study for comparison with peer and teacher feedback revisions, but the comparison was not complete. This was the peer reformulation procedure, developed by Cohen (1982, 1983), in which the learners give their first essay versions to native speaker peers, and the NS peers write the essays again in their own words, following as closely as possible the original ideas. This procedure results in a target language

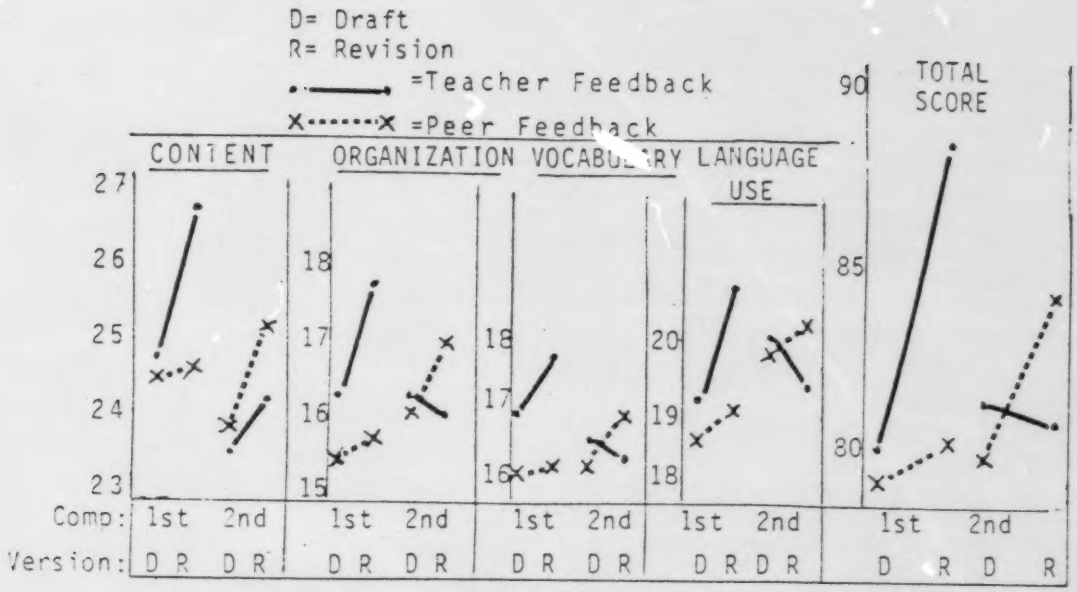

Figure 1

Improvement in four components and total between draft and revision on two compositions in two classes (N=23 each) (using Jacobs, et al., 1981, composition profile)

model illustrating lexical, stylistic, perhaps organizational, and other variances from the learners' own production, which the learners can compare quite narrowly with their first versions. This amounts perhaps to (i + 1) input. Cohen (1983) has found this procedure to have some benefits, but that it does not succeed as well as teacher feedback.

In the present study, the students in both class groups requested English-speaking peers to reformulate an in-class essay. Whereas I had originally intended to have the learners revise their essays on the basis of the peer reformulations, this was only done in the high intermediate class. In my own group, I asked the students to write a short paper comparing the differences and similarities they perceived between their own and the NS peer versions. Although improvement on revision due to the treatment could no longer be compared with improvement from teacher and peer feedback, changes in attitude toward the procedure were evident.

In Figure 2 is a representation of some of the ratings made by the three class groups before and after their experience with the treatments

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Insert Figure 2 about here

---

in question.

It should be recalled that the low intermediate group, the dotted bar, had not received the same type of treatment as the other two. On the whole, the responses on the identical first and second questionnaires were very close to one another, so that any large change on the post questionnaire probably represents a true effect of the writing experiences during the quarter.

Figure 2

Mean responses on questionnaire at start and end of three composition courses

Agree Strongly
Agree Somewhat
Not sure
Disagree Somewhat
Disagree Strongly
1. Before I hand in a paper I would like a fellow foreign student to read it for mistakes.
2. Before I hand in a paper I would like a fellow American student to read it for mistakes.
3. Before I hand in a paper I would like a writing tutor to read it for mistakes.
4. It would help me to compare my paper to the way an American student would write the same paper.
Advanced (N=13)
High Intermed. (N=15)
Low Intermed. (N=20)
Key
-- Increased agreement on post questionnaire
-- Decreased agreement on post questionnaire
-- Agreement on first questionnaire

A comparison of the relative height of the four sets of bars on the first questionnaire (the shadings and solid bars only) suggests that the students were consistently more positive abouat the feedback they would receive from first native speakers, and then NS tutors. The reformulation procedure, which had not been explained to them yet, appeared only to appeal more to the lowest level group.

Concerning only the larger changes, with the gains in attitude represented by the white boxes and the decreases by the lines, there is a marked improvement in the advanced group's attitude toward the reformulation, but less so for the high intermediate. The low intermediate group, which had not experienced that procedure, dropped off of their original view.

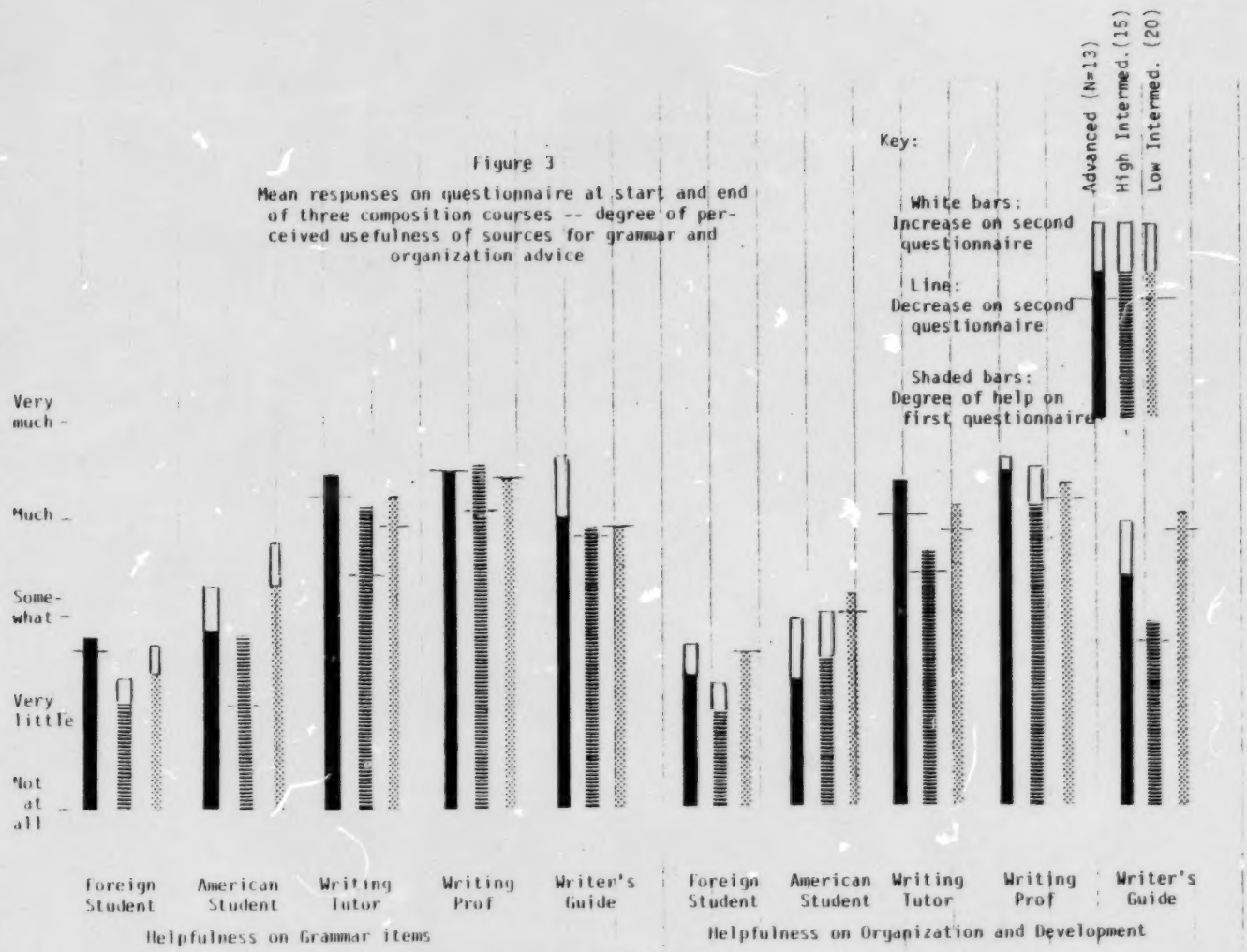
Another marked shift is the drop in attitude toward writing tutors by the high intermediate group, who had used a tutoring center rather extensively. According to their teacher, they had had some unproductive experiences with several non-native and some native tutors. This may also have influenced their drop in attitude toward the peer feedback procedure, seen in the first set of bars.

Insert Figure 3 about here

In Figure 3, another selection of responses is displayed. The students had rated, for each of several sources of assistance in writing, the degree of usefulness for aspects of writing such as mechanics, vocabulary, ideas and topics, grammar, etc. Displayed here are their responses for grammar and organization.

Figure 3

Mean responses on questionnaire at start and end of three composition courses -- degree of perceived usefulness of sources for grammar and organization advice



On this, the general lowering of attitude toward writing tutors is evident, especially for the high intermediate group again. This group also appeared to decrease in attitude to their professor's usefulness for grammar, but increase in attitude to her usefulness for organization. Similar reversals for the two areas are noticeable for the perceived usefulness of American students by the high and low intermediate groups, and possibly for the perception of foreign student usefulness by the advanced group.

Finally, the increase in attitude of the advanced group toward the usefulness of a writer's guide reflects the fact that this class used a standard guide as a course text.

The results of this study are more suggestive of future research to be undertaken than they are definitive proof for the value of one treatment over another. As seen in the different outcomes for the two groups in Figure 1 above, students may vary in the relative benefit they derive from peer feedback and teacher feedback, or in fact in the benefit they derive at all. Also, as seen in the changes in attitude, and as in Partridge's study (1981), foreign students are cautious about the value of peer feedback as a source of aid in revising their writing, although in written comments on a later part of the second questionnaire, they showed a great deal of appreciation of the peer feedback procedure. They made statements like the following:

> I have a chance to see what a person with the same educational level thinks about my essay.
>
> Helps me correct any error.
>
> Helps content.
>
> The peer critique helps the students to become more open to criticism other than the professor's as well as forces the

students to develop their capacities for critical analysis of written material.

In several cases of negative feeling, it was clear that this derived from individual cases of poor peer critics. To avoid any such difficulties, evaluation by peer groups may be advisable. In this type of procedure, each essay is critiqued by 3 to 4 other students; it is a logistical question whether or not to do this with the principal essays the students are to write, or whether to have such group work on in-class paragraphs. I believe benefit can be had from peer critiques on any length of essay; in fact, if for no other area, the more organizational issues are involved, the more the critics' insights would be valuable, for it is in this area that non-natives' judgments of clarity probably have greatest validity.

As for the effects of native speakers' reformulations on students' writing, it is regrettable that complete comparison with the other treatments was not possible. The students generally made superlative comments about this procedure. Although the effects were limited again by the particular quality of some students' peer reformulations, the students were very positive about the opportunity for such a comparison; some comments were:

> It also gives me confidence to find out that I can write just about as good as a native speaker.
>
> We should have had more of this exercise.
>
> I saw to which extent my own writing was not clear enough to make him reformulate some content.

This procedure deserves further study.

CONCLUSION

In summary, insofar as this study found no overall difference between improvement based on teacher or peer feedback, but could not test for possible differences of effect based on individual and group differences, further investigation along these lines is advisable. Except for Partridge's (1981) finding of a more positive effect for teacher feedback, studies of peer feedback procedure (in L1 contexts) have been either neutral in findings of differences, or positive in favor of peer feedback. Given the potential benefits of peer feedback as mentioned early in this paper, especially that it can relieve a much overworked teacher's editorial task, it is worthwhile exploring the use and effects of this procedure in L2 writing instruction.

Not to discount the value of product-oriented models and guidelines, I believe that the more the revision process can be learned as an interaction between writers and their readers, the more L2 learners will fully appreciate the functions, savor the fruits, as it were, of their newly acquired writing proficiency.

Notes

[1]There are many individuals who deserve thanks for their advice and participation in the development of this study. Donna Brinton provided the guiding impetus for me to undertake such a study in the first place, and specific advice and pointers on the conduct of my writing teaching, especially the peer critique procedure. She did much of the background research, too. I must also thank Debra Jonas for the extraordinary amount of time she put into the study, for conducting part of it in her class, and for patiently evaluating the many compositions we accumulated. I further appreciate the assistance rendered by Colin Churchill, Lorraine Kumpf, and Faye Peitzman. Of course, none of my colleagues is in any way responsible for the weaknesses in this paper.

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